

Men 'more depressed and sad' than women if childless, says study

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Men are almost as likely as women to want children, and they feel more isolated, depressed, angry and sad than women if they don't have them, a new study says.

The research, presented at the British Sociological Association annual conference in London today [Wednesday 3 April], also showed that cultural and family expectations were among the main influences on men's wish to have children.

Robin Hadley, of Keele University, carried out a survey of 27 men and 81 [women](#) who were not parents to ask them if they wanted to have children and why. Mr Hadley found that 59% of men (16) and 63% of women (51) said they wanted children.

Of the men who wanted children:

- 50% (8) had experienced [isolation](#) because they did not have any children, compared with 27% women (14)
- 38% (6) had experienced depression because they did not have any children, compared with 27% women (14)
- 25% (4) had experienced anger because they did not have any children, compared with 18% women (9)
- 56% (9) had experienced sadness because they did not have any

children, compared with 43% women (22)

- 56% (9) experienced jealousy of those with children, compared with 47% of women (24)
- 69% (11) had experienced yearning for a child, compared with 71% women (36)
- No men had experienced [guilt](#) because they did not have any children, compared with 16% women (8)

Mr Hadley found that the influences on [men and women](#) who wanted to have children varied.

[Childless women](#) were more likely to cite personal desire and biological urge as major influences, compared to men. Men were more likely to cite cultural, societal and family pressures than were women.

"There is very little research on the desire for [fatherhood](#) among men," Mr Hadley said. "My work shows that there was a similar level of desire for [parenthood](#) among childless men and women in the survey, and that men had higher levels of anger, depression, sadness, [jealousy](#) and isolation than women and similar level of yearning.

"This challenges the common idea that women are much more likely to want to have children than men, and that they consistently experience a range of negative emotions more deeply than men if they don't have children."

Mr Hadley conducted the survey using an online questionnaire among people aged 20 to 66, with an average age of 41. Just over 80% were white British, 69% had degrees, 69% worked full time and 90% were heterosexual. Mr Hadley said this was a qualitative study rather than a

quantitative statistical representation of British society.

Mr Hadley also surveyed another 125 men and women who already had children to find out whether they wanted more. He found that 50 women wanted children (59%) and 21 men (55%). The women who wanted more children, when they thought about not being able to have them, had higher levels of anger, depression, guilt, isolation, [sadness](#) and yearning than men.

In research carried out since his study, Mr Hadley has interviewed involuntary childless men. Among them were Russell, 55, who told him: "I'm 55, the light's been getting dimmer and dimmer and dimmer of me ever being a father, to the point now where it's not going to happen."

George, 60, said: "If you don't have children or grandchildren then that dimension of your life is missing."

Martin, 70, told him: "If I'd had children, I'd have been a proper grandfather. Maybe even a great grandfather by now."

Mr Hadley's work has drawn interest from across the world and he has been invited to conduct a talk on his work to the leading worldwide professional web-based network Sociology at Work.

Provided by Keele University

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